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ABSTRACT

A description is given of Project PELT (Preparation of Educational Leaders for Tomorrow), a cooperative administrative internship training program created to develop a talent pool of prospective administrators for relatively small school districts in Florida. Using a cooperative administrative internship training model, ten prospective principals were trained during the 1982-83 school year. The program was developed to fill a perceived need for an increase in the number of qualified women and minorities available for leadership positions in districts with limited financial resources. PELT sought to fill the need to narrow the gap between administrative theory and practice by structuring a practical "hands-on" administrative experience for interns based on sound theoretical precepts. (JD)

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PREPARING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS FOR TOMORROW

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Occasional Paper No. 9

INTRODUCTION

The direct responsibility for school management, instructional improvement and academic achievement rests in the hands of the school principal. Recent research indicates that principals of effective schools do exhibit common leadership skills.

In his book, Making Schools Work, Robert Benjamin (1981) summarized the characteristics of principals of effective schools, as reported in research studies. Principals of effective schools:

* Take strong initiative in identifying and articulating goals and priorities for their schools. They run their schools rather than allow them to operate by force of habit.

* Hold themselves and their staff personally accountable for student achievement in basic skills.

* Understand educational programs inside and out. They are instructional leaders rather than administrative leaders. Their first priority is instruction and they communicate this to staff.

* Are highly visible in the classrooms and hallways of the schools.

* Care more about their schools' academic progress than human relations or informal, collegial relationships with their staff members.

* Attempt to handpick their staff members. They put pressure on incompetent teachers to leave and find ways to reward excellent teachers.

* Set a tone of high expectations for their staff and students.

Ronald Edmonds (1979) has made a major contribution to the field of administrator effectiveness. On the basis of his extensive research, Edmonds concluded that schools and school leadership do make a difference--that there are tangible and indispensible characteristics of effective schools attributable to leadership. Effective schools according to Edmonds, are marked by leaders who:

* Promote an atmosphere that is orderly without being rigid, quiet without being oppressive, and generally conducive to the business at hand.

* Frequently monitor pupil progress.

* Make it incumbent upon the staff to be instructionally effective.

* Set clear goals and learning objectives.

* Develop and communicate a plan for dealing with reading and mathematics achievement problems.

* Demonstrate strong leadership with a mix of management and instructional skills.

In the February 1982 issue of Educational Leadership, James Sweeney provided a summary of the research on effective school leadership. He reviewed eight major studies and came to the following conclusions. School effectiveness is enhanced by principals who:

* Emphasize achievement.
* Set instructional strategies.
* Provide an orderly school atmosphere.
* Frequently evaluate pupil progress.
* Coordinate instruction.
* Support teachers.

Taken as a whole, these results strongly suggest that principals who set and monitor school goals, emphasize instruction, are assertive, results-oriented, and able to develop and maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning, do make a difference in schools.

As a result of this research on administrator effectiveness, the quality of leadership at the building level is a major concern for every school district in the country. "How," superintendents and school boards ask, "can potentially effective educational leaders be identified, trained and placed in key leadership positions so that they may make valuable contributions towards the education of the nation's young?"

As difficult as the question posed above is for moderate to larger school districts (15,000 students and above), it is substantially more difficult for small school districts. Larger districts have broader fiscal resources, greater human resources, and larger talent pools for implementing sophisticated leadership development programs. Larger districts are also the beneficiaries of the numbers game. They may justify expending scarce resources to train a sizable pool of potential school leaders because of a significant number of annual administrative vacancies created by growth, retirement, promotion, illness, resignations and a host of other factors.

Conversely, smaller districts tend to have very few vacancies to be filled each year. In fact, it is not unusual in some small districts to

have no administrative vacancies in a given year. However, when a vacancy does occur in a small district it is just as critical as it would be for a larger district to place a quality administrator in the position; one who is well-trained and capable of performing at a high level. The quandry many smaller school districts find themselves in is, "How do you develop potential administrators in a cost effective manner - particularly when developmental funds are severely limited?"

The member districts of the North East Florida Educational Consortium (NEFEC), an educational cooperative composed of nine rural Northeast Florida school districts, came together to address this problem. The result was Project PELT (Preparation of Educational Leaders for Tomorrow). Project PELT is an administrative internship program whose major goal is the satisfaction of the following needs as expressed by member districts of the NEFEC:

* The need to develop a shared talent pool of potential administrators who are qualified to fill leadership positions as they occur in the districts in a cost effective manner.

* The need to increase the number of qualified women and minorities available for leadership positions in the districts.

* The need to narrow the gap between administrative theory and practice by structuring a practical "hands-on", administrative experience for interns based on sound theoretical precepts.

OVERALL DESIGN OF THE PROGRAM

A cooperative administrative internship training model was utilized, since it was an effective and efficient vehicle to assure the transition of persons from non-administrative roles to administrative roles. The internship was designed to introduce potential administrators to the wide variety of issues, problems and decisions confronting practicing school administrators without being unduly costly. Additionally, the internship experience was selected because it would provide an opportunity for prospective administrators to integrate theoretical instruction with practical application in a job-like setting.

A total of ten interns was selected by participating districts to receive the specialized training. Of the ten, two were first-year principals, two were assistant principals, two were deans, one was a guidance counselor and the remaining three were teachers. Each administrative intern was assigned a school and an administrative supervisor. The supervisor was, in most cases, the building principal where the project intern held his/her

regular job assignments. In the case of the two first-year principals, a district staff member served as the site supervisor. Overall direction and planning was accomplished through the utilization of a project director employed by the Consortium. The project director assisted the interns and site supervisors in the design of individual intern improvement programs, arranged staff development activities and maintained communication among all project participants.

ORIENTATION AND PREASSESSMENT

An orientation and preassessment for program participants was held during August, 1982. Project interns were brought together for a program consisting of an overview of the project, an introduction to the role and responsibilities of the principalship and a thorough set of preassessment activities. Interns were evaluated in terms of their knowledge and experiential background in the major task areas of the principalship. An indepth assessment instrument that required each intern to estimate his/her own level of knowledge and experience in the following general areas was administered:

* Curriculum and Instruction
* School/Community Relations
* Pupil Personnel
* Staff Personnel
* School Plant
* Organization
* Auxiliary Services
* Business Management

Subsequently, each intern participated in a structured interview to preassess certain personal behaviors thought to be important to the success of principals. The interview panel consisted of a district administrator, a principal, a teacher and a parent who interviewed each intern for a principal's vacancy in a simulated school situation. Questions were structured to allow the interview panel to judge the following characteristics: decision-making skills, decisiveness, the ability to organize and express ideas, knowledge of broad educational issues, technical expertise, composure, and commitment to public school education. Each member of the interview panel independently marked a rating sheet on each intern to indicate areas of strength and weakness.

The results of the preassessment instrument on the task areas of the principalship, together with the results of the rating sheets from the simulated interview, were analyzed for each intern. This information formed

the basis for the preparation of individual improvement programs for each intern. Individual improvement programs consisted of a set of unique administrative learning activities and experiences that the intern would participate in over the course of the year. The improvement plan was jointly developed by the intern, his or her site supervisor and the project director. The project director also performed an analysis of the results of the preassessment activities and scheduled a series of joint staff development experiences in those skill areas where interns had similar skill deficiencies.

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Interns were exposed to a variety of developmental experiences over the course of the year. On a daily basis each intern worked at his or her school site with the site supervisor to accomplish those professional growth tasks defined in the intern's individual improvement plan. In addition, the interns met periodically as a group to participate in joint learning experiences and to exchange ideas.

Special Institutes

Two intensive three-day institutes were offered to program participants. One institute, "The Principal as a Manager," exposed the interns to techniques or organizing, managing and accomplishing the myriad tasks associated with the day-to-day operations of a school. A second institute, "The Principal as an Instructional Leader," acquainted interns with the critical elements of effective instruction and delineated the methods and procedures a principal should use to bring about instructional improvement in a school setting. Both institutes focused on skill building rather than theoretical concepts.

Seminars

A series of seminars was also held to address district level operations and to acquaint the interns with the principal's role as a member of a district-wide management team. Seminars were planned and delivered by selected district personnel who had actual responsibility for administering programs in the following areas: maintenance and operations, school food service, finance, purchasing, personnel, pupil services, curriculum and instruction, data processing, and school/community relations. As with other developmental activities, interns traveled across district lines to participate in these seminars. This arrangement recognized and used talent wherever it existed

throughout the Consortium and facilitated the sharing of problems and solutions across district lines. The interns valued these seminars and the opportunities to learn from administrators who were on the firing line.

Individual Improvement Plans

As mentioned previously, each intern was required to develop an individual improvement plan based on his/her own personal profile of strengths and weaknesses that were identified in the preassessment stage of the project. If, for example, an intern had perceived weaknesses in the areas of student scheduling and budgeting, a series of experiences was specifically planned for that individual to alleviate these weaknesses.

As a part of the individual improvement plan, each intern was expected to complete a "core" of thirty activities designed to cut across the broad range of responsibilities associated with the principalship. Core activities included classroom observations, discipline of students, presentations at faculty meetings, coordinating emergency drills, responding to parent requests for information, interviewing prospective teachers, and many more experiences.

THE RESULTS OF PROJECT PELT

At the completion of the school year, the administrative interns participating in Project PELT were re-evaluated to ascertain the effects of the training experiences they had participated in. The final evaluation process included: (a) a reassessment of the perceived cognitive and experiential knowledge of each intern as to the specific tasks of the principalship; (b) a simulated job interview; (c) a debriefing of each intern; and (d) the gathering of input from site supervisors and superintendents as to the effectiveness of the program and the growth of the participants.

Comparison of Pre- and Post-Internship Assessments of Cognitive and Experiential Knowledge

Each intern was required to complete a self-assessment instrument at the beginning and at the conclusion of the training program. The instrument was comprised of eight major sections containing a total of ninety-three statements. Each intern responded to each statement by indicating on a four point Likert scale the degree to which he or she believed himself or herself to possess the cognitive and experiential knowledge specified. As an example, under the topic of "School and Community Relations," each intern

responded to the following statement utilizing the prescribed format:

Task	Knowledge Level			
Development of policies for interacting with the news media and community power groups.	a) COGNITIVE			
	No Knowledge or Understanding 1	Below Average 2	Above Average 3	Complete Knowledge or Understanding 4
	b) EXPERIENTIAL			
	No Knowledge or Understanding 1	Below Average 2	Above Average 3	Complete Knowledge or Understanding 4

The four point Likert scale was used to reduce the "central response" effects and to force participants to indicate at least above or below average knowledge and understanding.

Analysis of the results of the self-perceptions of the interns yielded interesting and meaningful results. At the beginning of the administrative internship program, the participants indicated that they had below average cognitive and experiential knowledge of the tasks of the principalship (See Graphs 1 and 2). The interns perceived themselves as especially weak in actual "hands on" experineces at the start of the project. In fact, analysis of preassessment responses utilizing a one-way t-test revealed a significant difference at the .02 level between the cognitive and experiential responses of the interns. Simply, the interns weren't as knowledgeable about theory as they should be and were significantly weaker in actual administrative experience.

The post-assessment responses of the interns to the same instrument were markedly different from those given during preassessment. After the administrative internship experience, the participants perceived themselves to be above average in cognitive knowledge of the tasks of the principalship, In terms of their knowledge of principalship tasks based on experinece, the interns perceived themselves to have improved to the point of being average (See Graphs 1 and 2). The results of the post-assessment of the perceptions of the administrative interns indicate that the participants believed themselves to have more cognitive knowledge and more actual experiences relevent to school administration than before they entered the training program.

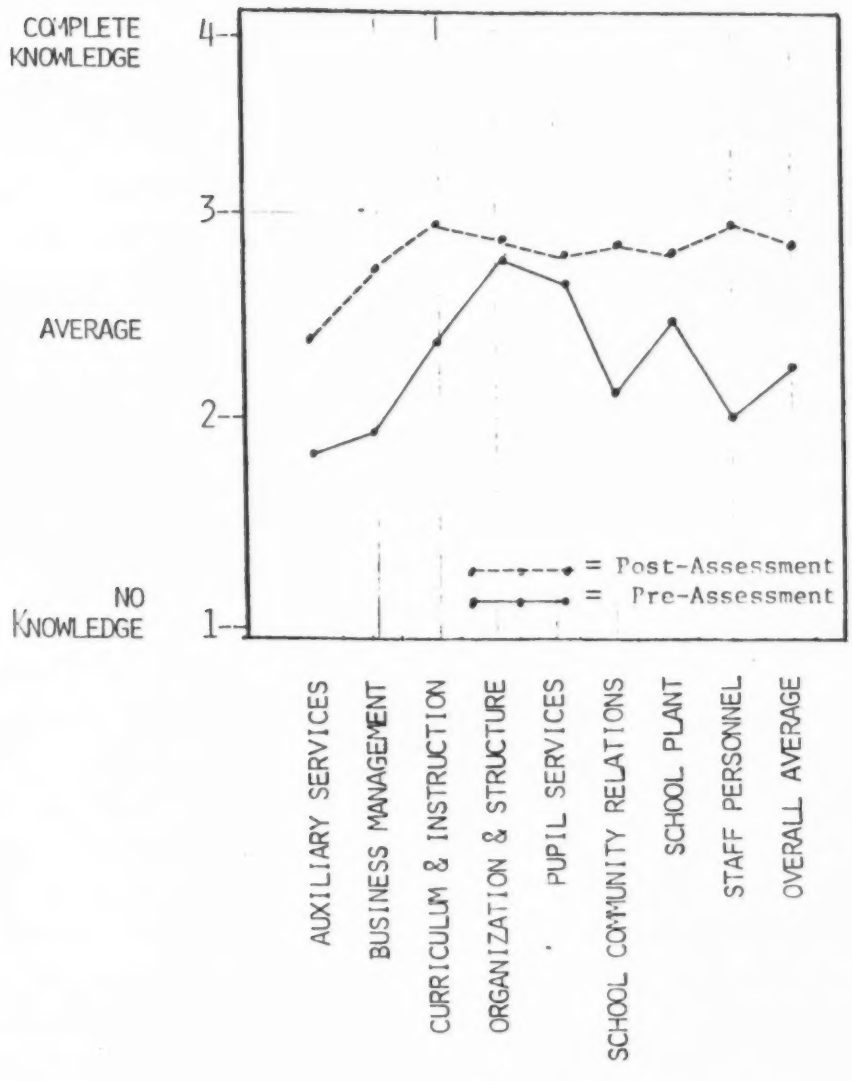
An important change reflected by the post assessment data was that the "gap" between cognitive knowledge and experiential knowledge had been reduced.

Analysis of post assessment responses utilizing a one-way t-test revealed no significant difference at the .02 level between the cognitive and experiential responses of the interns. Though the interns continued to rate themselves higher in cognitive as opposed to experiential knowledge after the internship experinece, the difference was no longer statistically significant.

GRAPH 1

PRE- AND POST-COGNITIVE SKILLS

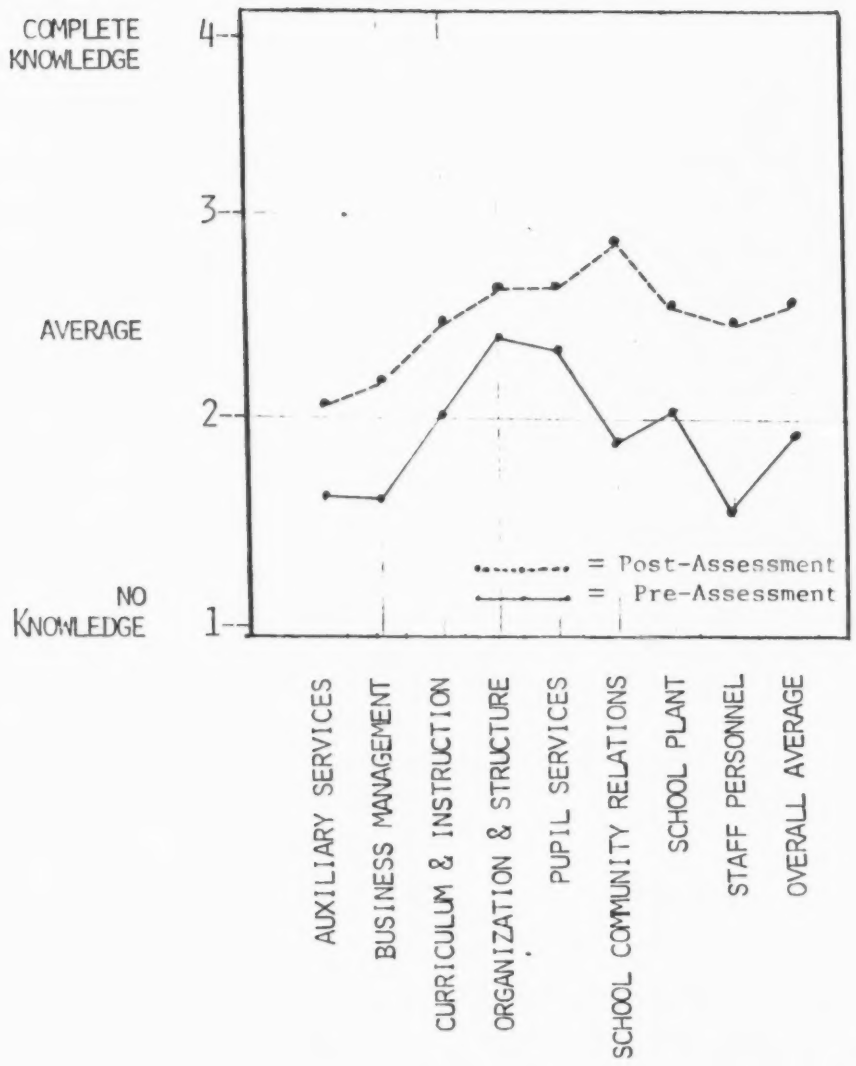
SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS



GRAPH 2

PRE- AND POST-EXPERIENTIAL SKILLS

SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS



Comparison of Pre- and Post-Internship Interview Ratings

At the beginning of the internship project, each participant was interviewed by a four member panel composed of a teacher, principal, parent and district office staff member. The interview panel was asked to evaluate each intern as though an actual administrative position were available. The process was repeated again at the end of the internship period using a new set of panelists.

Analysis of the results revealed that at the end of the internship experience the interns were rated higher by the interview panel in every category (See Graph 3). A four point Likert scale was used by each panelist to independently rate each intern as to: (a) decision-making skills; (b) decisiveness; (c) ability to relate to others; (d) ability to organize and express ideas; (e) knowledge of broad educational issues; (f) technical expertise; (g) composure; and (h) commitment. An example of the rating scale follows:

Factor	Unacceptable	Below Average	Above Average	Outstanding
Decision-Making Skills	1	2	3	4

When the internship program began, the average participant was rated above average in only two of the eight categories measured. At the conclusion of the administrative training program, the typical participant was rated as above average in six out of the eight categories. There was an observable positive change in the interns in all eight categories from pre- to post-assessment.

A statistical analysis of the pre- and post-internship interview ratings was conducted utilizing a one-way t-test. A significant difference at the .02 level was found. The interns were perceived significantly more positively by the parent, teacher, principal and district staff members on the interview panel as a result of participating in the training program.

Interns' Perceptions of the Administrative Training Program

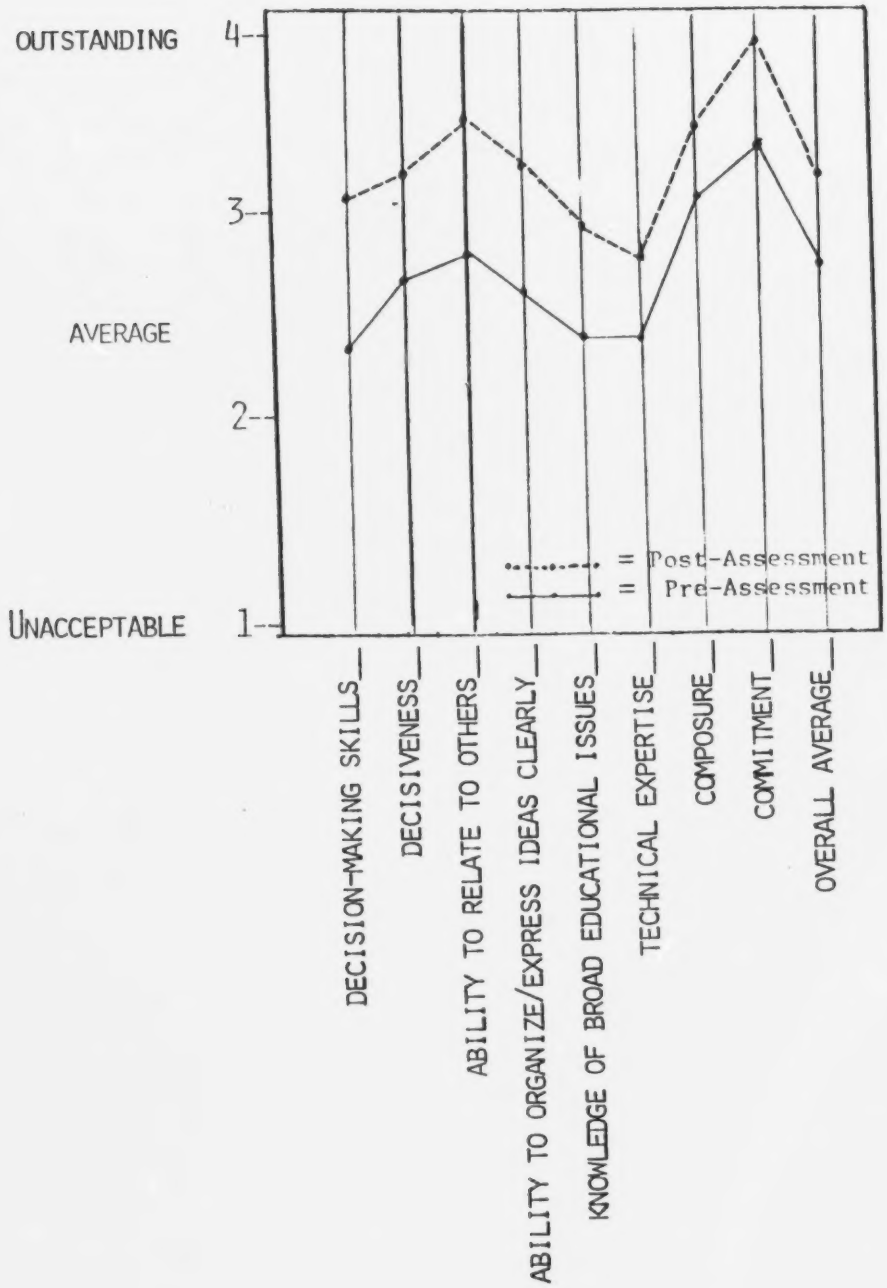
Each intern was asked at the conclusion of the year-long training program to indicate the degree to which PELT met its stated objectives. The responses were quite positive. Typical of what the administrative interns had to say about the experience are the responses provided below:

> "I did the entire school F.T.E. (State Pupil Membership Report) this year. Up until this time, I'd never seen one."

GRAPH 3

PRE- AND POST-INTERVIEW

ASSESSMENT RESULTS



"I feel that we had a successful year at our school. One reason for the success is that I have been able to bring many skills learned in PELT back to the school to improve the overall situation there."

"I feel very fortunate to have been in the program. It answered many questions and helped to head off a lot of potential problems."

"I enjoyed meeting people from other districts and sharing problems and remedies."

"Because of PELT I feel that I'm a step closer to being able to handle a leadership role."

Superintendents' and Site Supervisors' Perceptions of the Administrative Training Program

Formal input about the effectiveness of the PELT program was sought from each intern's site supervisor at the conclusion of the project. The site supervisors agreed with the interns that: (a) the interns had gained significant administrative knowledge and experinece during the project; (b) the interns had opportunities to assume leadership roles in planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation that would probably have not been possible without the internship program; and that (c) the interns gained insight into the relationship of administrative theory and practice.

Informal input from selected superintendents of participating districts was also obtained at the conclusion of the project. A statement by one of the superintendents exemplifies the success of the project.

"Having seen the growth of my people who have participated in PELT this year, I definitely want to be sure that others in my district receive this training."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE TRAINING PROGRAMS

While PELT was highly successful as evidenced by assessment instruments, simulated job interviews, self-evaluations and the perceptions of practicing administrators, the training program was not without problems. Future administrative training programs may function even more effectively if the following occur:

1. Each administrative intern should be provided with sufficient released time from regular teaching duties. Each intern should be able to "shadow" a principal during various portions of the school day. Only by this method can the intern fully comprehend the routine of administering a school. At a minimum, the equivalent of two released periods per day should be provided for each intern.

2. Those persons who serve as role models (site supervisors) for the administrative interns should be carefully screened, selected, trained and monitored. Interns should be assigned only to those practicing administrators who are experienced and qualified. Site supervisors need to be carefully briefed as to their roles and responsibilities in the program. They must be self-confident enough to allow questioning by the intern. Site supervisors should attend workshops and seminars with the interns. This increases intern/supervisor interaction and also updates the skills of the site supervisor.

3. Administrative interns should be assigned to more than one school site during the training period. Each school has a unique clientele, set of operating norms and leadership style. Unless the intern is made aware of such differences, his or her learning experience is less valuable than it might be.

4. Seminars and workshops should be "action" or "hands on" oriented. The purpose of an internship is to have prospective principals practice administrative approaches, not to assume a passive role that occurs when sessions are lecture oriented.

WAS PELT A SUCCESS?

Evidence has been presented throughout this article that Project PELT produced a positive perceptual change in the cognitive and experiential skill levels of the administrative interns. While such evidence is important to the determination of a successful training program, the crucial test is yet to come. The basic question still to be answered is, "Will those who have participated in PELT perform effectively in real life administrative roles?"

While this question cannot yet be unequivocally answered, it is interesting to note that at the conclusion of this project one intern had already been appointed to a principalship position for 1983-84. Another had been assigned to an assistant principal's position for 1983-84 and two other interns were under serious consideration for high school principalships.

SUMMARY

The North East Florida Educational Consortium has sought to meet a critical need of its member districts - the development of a talent pool of prospective administrators - through implementation of Project PELT. Utilizing an experience-based approach, NEFEC trained a pool of ten prospective principals during the 1982-83 school year. Various measures of the effectiveness of the training program all indicate that the process has been successful. While the ultimate effectiveness of the project can

only be judged by the performance of the interns once they are assigned to leadership positions, the training program has greatly increased the probability that those assuming such positions will be more knowledgeable and better trained than in the past.

In relatively small districts like those comprising the North East Florida Educational Consortium, the cooperative approach to training poetential administrators has been proven not only to be possible but also to be very effective. Schools and school districts are now seeing the benefits of selecting, training and encouraging potential educational leaders.

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